

To the Education Committee and those present,

Our family has recently relocated to the state of Connecticut from North Carolina and are registered voting constituents residing in Hamden. Patrick Diener is an adjunct professor and Director of the Institute for Catholic Philanthropy housed at the University of Mary in Bismarck, ND and serves as the Director of Charitable Giving for the Knights of Columbus in New Haven. Kathryn Diener is the in-house educator for our five children. Both Patrick and Kathryn have achieved masters-level education.

We strongly oppose sections 17 and 18 of the proposed SB 874, specifically (a) those lines requiring parents who home educate their children to appear in person to register annually and (b) the distinction drawn between state-approved curricula and other curricula. This is a drastic departure from Connecticut's current laws and its necessity is wholly undemonstrated.

We faithfully pay our taxes to support the Connecticut public schools. By choosing to not enroll our five children in the Hamden school system, we save our neighbors \$18,786 annually per child (cf. the CT State Department of Education report, 2018). Connecticut has never granted our children access to any of the programs in our public schools in spite of the fact that we both pay taxes and have requested services that would still cost the state less than enrolling our children fully in the school system. This is discrimination, and further requiring home educators to register their children (when parents of private school children do not) is further discrimination based on our lifestyle choice and desiring the best education for our children.

This new proposal targets the precise population of parents who are most personally invested in bringing up responsible and respectful citizens of the state. According to the National Home Education Research Institute, the success of home education is statistically clear:

- The home-educated student typically score 15 to 30 percentile points above public-school students on standardized academic achievement tests. (The public school average is the 50th percentile; scores range from 1 to 99.) A 2015 study found Black homeschool students to be scoring 23 to 42 percentile points above Black public school students (Ray, 2015).
- Homeschool students score above average on achievement tests regardless of their parents' level of formal education or their family's household income. Whether homeschool parents were ever certified teachers is not related to their children's academic achievement.
- Degree of state control and regulation of homeschooling is not related to academic achievement.
- Home-educated students typically score above average on the SAT and ACT tests that colleges consider for admissions.

Our children mirror these trends, testing significantly higher than state benchmarks and engaging wider formative experiences than available in the public school system. If there is a question of suitability, maybe the committee should take a note from North Carolina and encourage home educators to register their schools as “private”. This is a much more logical step than the current language which groups home educators into a category with underperforming educational institutions.

In spite of the funding, the state’s own schools have largely failed our children by allowing state and federal government to treat them as disposable subjects in a series of failed educational experiments, No Child Left Behind and Common Core being more recent examples. Of the over 535,000 students in Connecticut’s state schools, over 12% will never graduate high school; over 10% are chronically absentee. Privileged students enrolled in public school supplement their learning with costly private tutoring; those who cannot afford this are at a disadvantage. Teachers are underpaid and often put undertrained into large classrooms where they are the only responsible adults. Students in inner city schools spend more time studying to pass tests and assessments than they do in healthy childhood activities such as play, music, exercise, or experiencing the outdoors.

A system that cannot get its own house in order financially or educationally has no right to insert itself into our home, which is in order.

Furthermore, concerns about at risk children do not belong to the purview of the superintendents or school districts: they belong to DCF, which investigates all reported homes regardless of where the parents choose to educate their children. Targeting home educators for “registration” as the only non-state school population to come under the oversight of the school districts is, again, blatant discrimination.

We urge you to stop SB 874 immediately and definitively.

Sincerely,

Patrick S. Diener, MA, CFRE
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Knights of Columbus University of Mary

Kathryn M. Diener, MA
Home Educator